ME AND MICROAGGRESSIONS: A FRAMEWORK FOR OVERCOMING MICROAGGRESSIONS IN COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Karen C. Davis, Ph.D. CCC-SLP
Department of Health and Human Performance
Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN

In light of the recent acknowledgment of social and racial injustice in this country, the discipline of communication sciences and disorders (CSD) has been reflecting on the experiences of minority practitioners, faculty, and students. I was assigned to teach a multicultural course this semester. To prepare for my course, I attended several of the live webinars sponsored by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), journals, and other special interest organizations. These webinars addressed issues of cultural diversity and equity within CSD. Panelists that participated in these webinars shared their experiences along with recommendations for change. From these webinars, I heard descriptions of verbal behaviors that appeared to be racial, perpetuated stereotypes, and often disregarded individual's feelings. The panelists often discussed how these behaviors were not overt, but after a while could negatively impact an individual's well-being. The term 'microaggression' was mentioned. In addition to watching webinars, I researched journal articles regarding recruitment and retention of minority students in CSD. Ginsberg's (2018) research on African American speech-language pathology students' academic success caught my attention. She defined and discussed microaggressions that participants in the study experienced.

As I read Ginsberg's (2018) article, I began to reflect on my experience with microaggressions in academia as a student. I recall the feelings of loneliness and self-doubt. While in school, I did not realize I was experiencing microaggressions because it is often downplayed; therefore, I did not know what to call it. There are scholars (e.g., Campbell & Manning, 2014; Lilienfeld, 2017; Thomas, 2008) that minimize the impact of microaggressions and believe microaggressions are just everyday rudeness that anyone can experience. However, Sue (in press), has provided evidence that microaggressions, particularly, racial microaggressions are indeed more than just general rudeness. Racial microaggressions are constant acts experienced by people of color and symbolic of past social and governmental injustices.

The purpose of this paper is to define microaggressions for readers and discuss its impact on the educational experiences of minority students. I will share personal experiences in academia to provide examples of the various types of microaggressions. Lastly, this paper will introduce a framework developed by Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, and Mendez (2019) highlighting strategies to address racial microaggressions within communication sciences and disorders programs.

Microaggression

The term "microaggression" was first coined in 1978 by Chester M. Pierce to describe a phenomenon of subtle negative exchanges directed toward African Americans (Pierce, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978). Microaggressions can be related to race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, or other features that reflect some aspect of personal identity. While microaggressions most often present as verbal slights in spoken language, they may also take on nonverbal or environmental forms (Harrison & Tanner, 2018). Environmental forms are often difficult to recognize and remedy because they exist on a systemic level. Examples of environmental forms are having only one student of color in a program (tokenism), curricular exclusion of content and perspectives from non-white authors, and emphasizing the narratives of white people regarding race (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). Racial microaggression is defined as the everyday slights, insults, putdowns, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people of color experience in daily interactions with generally well-intentioned white Americans who may be unaware that they have engaged in racially demeaning ways toward target groups (Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). The idea of microaggressions has been

around for decades, but it has more recently come to the forefront in disciplines such as psychology, teacher education, social work, and medicine. There are three types of microaggressions: (a) microinsults (b) microinvalidation, and (c) microassaults. I will discuss my experience with all three types.

Microinsults. Microinsults are interpersonal or environmental communication that conveys rudeness, insensitivity, and stereotypes that cast a negative light on a particular demographic group. For example, commenting on how well an English Learner speaks English or asking someone of color if their presence in a particular school or job is through minority-focused initiatives (e.g. grants, scholarships, affirmative action). Microinsults are often committed unconsciously; therefore, appearing more subtle (Harrison and Tanner, 2018; Sue, 2010). During my time in graduate school, there were multiple instances where I experienced microinsults as a daily right-of-passage. I recall two specific incidents of microinsults that I experienced that can be considered examples of microsinsults.

Microinsult example 1. After completing a presentation for a one-day workshop, an attendee approached me afterward and said to me, "I don't know how to really say this, but you speak so well; very professional." She went on to tell me that she works with an inner-city afterschool program consisting primarily of African American adolescent females. She stated, "I wish they could see and hear you present. You are such a great example." I thanked the attendee for the compliment and felt this relief because a few weeks prior I had conducted an oral presentation in class. A rubric was used to grade the presentation and I lost points due to my accent, my hand gestures, and a couple of features of African American English. The comments recommended that I be careful of these behaviors because it takes away from my professionalism. In this example, the individuals shared these comments to compliment me and to prepare me to be successful during oral presentations. However, commenting on how articulate I am, sends the message that it is uncommon for African Americans to have a command of Standard American English and a level of professionalism. Telling me to watch my verbal and non-verbal behaviors sends the message that the way I communicate is abnormal and I must change aspects of my identity to meet their standards.

Microinsult Example 2. I was accepted into the ASHA Minority Student Leadership Program (MSLP) and my professor announced it to my cohort. I was in the workroom with one of my classmates and she congratulated me. My classmate then asked me about the program details and I explained the purpose and described the award package. My classmate says to me, "I find it interesting that ASHA has such programs, but there are no special programs that I can apply to. There are not any special programs like that for me because I am white." I took her words to mean that as a minority, I have access to more resources and programs within our discipline and she felt that was unfair. She then eluded to another minority student being accepted into a graduate program because of the program's need to meet a diversity quota. As described in the definition of microinsults, my classmate was not intentionally trying to be insulting, but her words communicated that minorities are given advantages to programs based on race and not their ability. Truthfully, there were times I did feel that I may have been accepted into the program due to my race. At the time I was the first and only minority in the newly established program. My classmate's comments confirmed what I thought my white peers may have been thinking about my presents in the program. I internalized what she communicated and began to question my capabilities and worthiness to be in the program.

Microinvalidations. Microinvalidations are defined as communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiential realities of certain groups. For example, the validity and accuracy of the experience are questioned. A person of color may be told that they misunderstood the communication, they are being overly sensitive, or their concern is just disregarded (Sue, 2010; Harrison & Tanner, 2018). I share an experience that serves as an example of microinvalidation.

Microinvalidation example. I witnessed a professor make a stereotypical joke to another professor about being late all the time. The comment was, "I don't know why you are always late; you are not from the population/community that is known for that." I interpreted the comment as making a generalizing about a group of people of color. I shared this with a white classmate and she responded by saying I was probably being too sensitive. I began to think that maybe my classmate was correct; however, I was still bothered by it. I shared the incident with an African American faculty member and I observed a look of disappointment on this faculty member's face. The faculty member said to me, "I will not comment on that. Just keep your head down and do not bite the hands that feed you. Do what you have to do to get out of this program." In this example, my feelings were not acknowledged. Denying the reality that faculty can make culturally insensitive comments sends the message that my concern is not viewed seriously. By the faculty member choosing to not comment on the situation, suggested that my program may not be supportive of similar discussion is presented and

that could potentially make my journey to graduation difficult.

Microassaults. Unlike microinsults and micro-invalidations, microassaults are biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups. Also, microassaults are described as conscious and deliberate. It is the microaggression that is easier to identify because it is mostly related to outright prejudice and discrimination (Sue, 2010). There were several times I experienced microassaults as well. I will share two experiences that can serve as examples.

Microassault Example 1. I remember being in class with my peers sharing research proposals as part of the class assignment. One peer shared her research and stated boldly that her study will only include White participants and not minorities because there is always research addressing minority participants' needs. Although my classmate had the right to conduct a study targeting a specific population. However, in research, a rationale supported by the research literature is needed. This classmate's rationale was not supported by research, but her perception that minorities receive too much attention in research and she verbalized that in class as she quickly glanced at me. This communication aligned with "outright discrimination" that is in the definition of microassaults.

Microassault Example 2. Another exchange with this peer involved discussing the various celebratory multicultural programs supported by the university for Black History Month. This discussion happened in a class in which she and I were the only students enrolled. This peer expressed, "I am so tired of this multicultural stuff and such initiatives are not needed and quite exhausting." Later in the class, and the instructor was present, she made the following comment, "Bill Cosby says there is no need for Black History Month." However, this classmate does not feel this way about Women's History Month. I interpreted her comments as intentional to disregard the existence of a racist society and the value of the contributions of minorities to this country. Her communication to highlight an African American celebrity was a way for her to justify her insensitive belief. It also communicated that African Americans are monolithic in that the community loves this celebrity and deems him as a spokesperson for the entire race. In line with the definition of microassault, her comments communicated a biased attitude specifically towards African Americans. The instructor did not respond to the comments. Therefore, the nonresponse communicated that the use of this language is allowed that can be offensive to an individual from a minority group.

The effects of microaggressions

While definitions and examples of the different types of microaggressions have been presented, microaggressions are a complex topic to understand; especially if you do not have personal experiences. According to Torres and Driscoll (2010), microaggressions results in some degree of psychological and emotional harm that can negatively impact learning, engagement, and belonging in an academic setting. Individuals that experience microaggressions may begin to internalize negative feelings about themselves resulting in depression and low self-esteem (Nadal, Wong, Griffen, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014).

My experiences with microaggressions impacted me emotionally and psychologically. I began to internalize the belief that I was viewed as a weak student needing much support. I began to think that I was accepted into the program to diversify enrollment. I felt alone in my major department and found myself seeking support from faculty and peers in a different department. I was constantly focused on making sure that I did not confirm any negative stereotypes (e.g. 'Angry Black Woman"). I felt anxious all the time. I even began using different entranceways into the department building to avoid some faculty and classmates. When I began my first job in academia, I did experience severe imposter syndrome based on my experiences in my graduate program. I doubted if I was worthy to be a tenure-track junior faculty.

The importance of Community Support in Communication Sciences and Disorders

Increasing the diversity among faculty members in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) programs is critical for supporting the learning of all prospective speech-language pathologists and audiologists, especially in the United States. With the demographic changes in the United States population, having culturally and ethnically diverse faculty is imperative to the education of undergraduate and graduate CSD students. Diverse faculty's knowledge, clinical experience, and research teach cultural awareness and competence that are necessary skills needed to serve diverse clients (Goldsmith, Tran, & Tran, 2014; Hyter, and Salas-Province, 2019). Additionally, ethnically and culturally diverse faculty can attract under-representative individuals to the discipline (Green, 2018; Lugo et al., 2001).

Presently, the faculty educating CSD students are not representative of the clients served. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2020) Ph.D. holders report, 4,809 individuals hold a research doctoral degree and 15.7% of minorities have a doctoral degree in speech-language pathology or audiology. Out of 2,263 Ph.D. holders working pri-

marily in colleges and universities, 84.9% are White, while 5.8% are African American, 7.6% are Asian, 0.1% are American Indian, and 0.0% Pacific Islander (ASHA, 2020).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association advises universities to promote diversity. For university programs to meet uphold program standards, there is a need for ethnically and culturally diverse faculty with doctoral degrees in the fields of CSD (Battle, 1999). There have been several initiatives to recruit and retain faculty of color. However, one factor impacting the growth of diverse faculty is the continued paucity of anticipated graduates among minority doctoral students in CSD. Overall, there is a small percentage of students pursuing doctoral degrees in speech-language pathology or audiology; an even smaller number of minorities. Therefore, attention is needed on increasing the number of doctoral candidates from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to prepare them for faculty positions (Myotte, Hutchins, Cannizzaro, & Belin, 2011). Similar to the recruitment and retention of minority faculty, numerous organizations recognize the need to recruit and retain minority doctoral students. In efforts to recruit potential students, many universities have established fellowships, and grant programs specifically for increasing underrepresented populations. While these programs are well-intentioned, there are challenges that doctoral students encounter in their academic and clinical experiences that could potentially hinder their career plans or confidence in becoming a faculty member.

As stated earlier, microaggressions are complex and maybe an overlooked factor in initiatives to increase diversity in academic programs. The research (e.g., Caplan & Ford, 2014; Ginsberg, 2018; Pasque, Chesler, & Charbeneau, & Carlson, 2013; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010) supports that students are being impacted by microaggressions. Unwelcoming environments can lead to feelings of distress, which may impact academic performance and mental health. This could lead to students dropping out of programs or college altogether. Microaggressions may not be the sole cause of unwelcoming environments but being aware of the use of language and acknowledging what is said may have large impacts on students, faculty, and staff (Seidel, Reggi, Shinske, Burrus, & Tanner 2015).
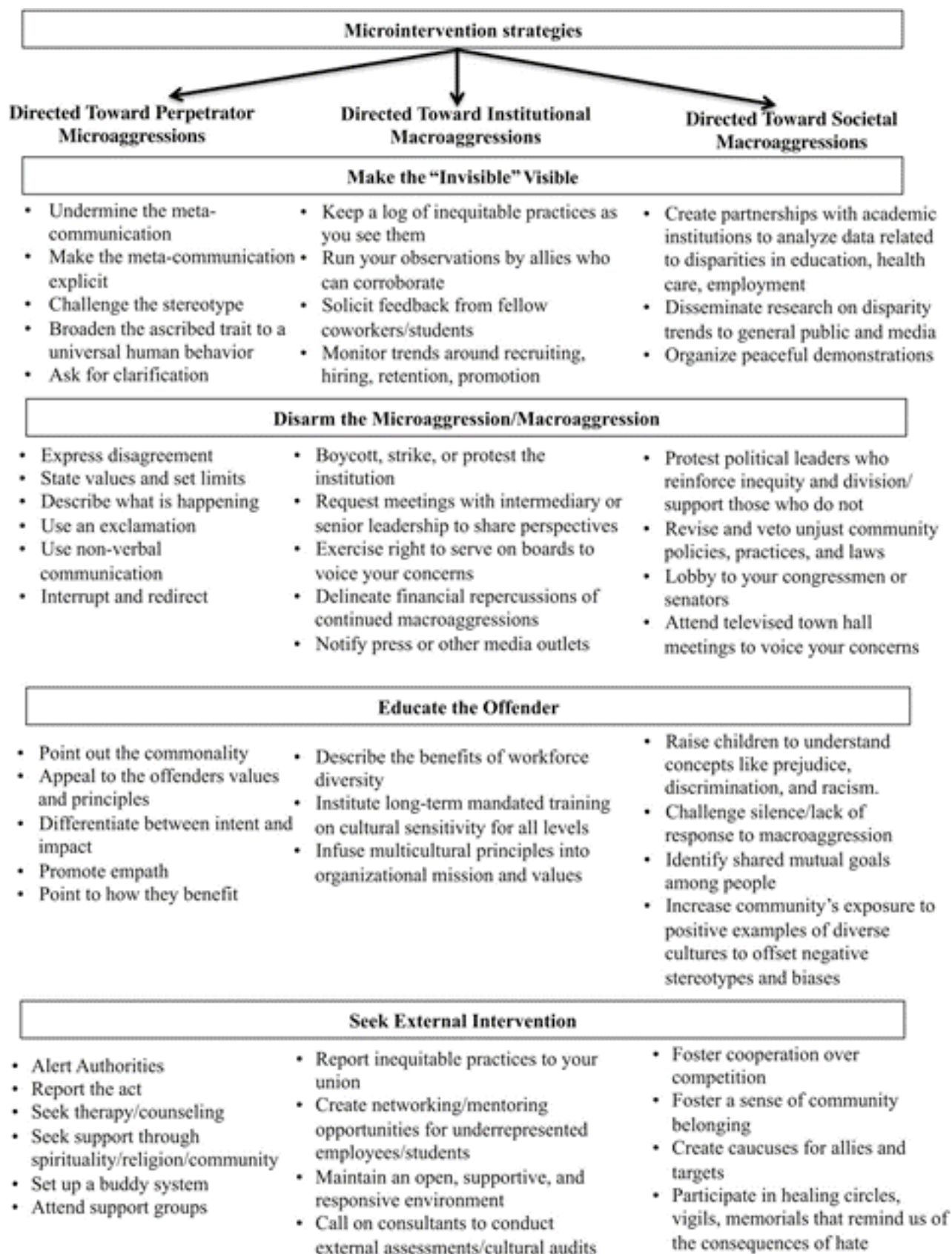
So, what do we do?

Sue et al. (2019) offers a framework for disarming racial microaggressions by implementing microintervention strategies for targets, allies, and bystanders. Microintervention strategies are directed toward perpetrator microaggressions, institutional macroaggressions, and societal macroaggressions. For this paper, the focus is directed towards the perpetrator; the person that commits the microaggression. The strategic goals of microintervention are to (a) make the "invisible" visible, (b) disarm the microaggression, (c) educate the offender, and (d) seek support when needed. See the table on the next page.

Graduate programs can use this framework to develop microinterventions influenced by the experiences of enrolled students. Communication Sciences and Disorders programs must embed in their strategic plan cultural responsiveness strategies to support minority students. Goals should be set and measured to determine outcomes.

There should be consultation with student affairs and/or diversity officials to conduct ongoing, high-quality professional development for faculty, staff, and students regarding microaggressions, cross-cultural mentoring, and becoming an ally. It is also important for microaggressions to be integrated into the course curriculum. If these practices had been in place while I was in my graduate program, my instructors, peers, and I would strengthen our knowledge of cultural responsiveness. A supportive space would have been established for open discussions about microaggressions and establish strategies to manage them. I probably would have been more comfortable selecting a mentor within my departments because the faculty would know how to listen and not be dismissive of my experiences. Overall, I would feel that my program truly values diversity and has a commitment to meeting the needs of minority students.

Alone, microinterventions will not cure microaggressions; however, it is a start. There must be continuous self-reflection and honest dialogue to contribute to the mission of ASHA to provide quality educational preparation to produce culturally responsive clinicians (ASHA, 2016c), and to attract underrepresented groups to the discipline. The open dialogue and reflection would allow for discussion about race, gender, or related identity categories to understand individual emotions surrounding the topic, to dispel biases and stereotypes (Burke, 2017). This would allow students, faculty, and staff to recognize how influential language is in promoting inclusion, a sense of belonging, and student success. CSD programs must analyze practices impacting daily interaction, teaching, and supervision of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This analysis would allow a program to identify the types of microaggressions that exist and determine which microintervention strategies may be most effective. This could lead to the implementation of high-quality professional development which is ongoing training and

Microintervention strategies		
Directed Toward Perpetrator Microaggressions	**Directed Toward Institutional Macroaggressions**	**Directed Toward Societal Macroaggressions**
Make the "Invisible" Visible		
• Undermine the meta-communication • Make the meta-communication explicit • Challenge the stereotype • Broaden the ascribed trait to a universal human behavior • Ask for clarification	• Keep a log of inequitable practices as you see them • Run your observations by allies who can corroborate • Solicit feedback from fellow coworkers/students • Monitor trends around recruiting, hiring, retention, promotion	• Create partnerships with academic institutions to analyze data related to disparities in education, health care, employment • Disseminate research on disparity trends to general public and media • Organize peaceful demonstrations
Disarm the Microaggression/Macroaggression		
• Express disagreement • State values and set limits • Describe what is happening • Use an exclamation • Use non-verbal communication • Interrupt and redirect	• Boycott, strike, or protest the institution • Request meetings with intermediary or senior leadership to share perspectives • Exercise right to serve on boards to voice your concerns • Delineate financial repercussions of continued macroaggressions • Notify press or other media outlets	• Protest political leaders who reinforce inequity and division/support those who do not • Revise and veto unjust community policies, practices, and laws • Lobby to your congressmen or senators • Attend televised town hall meetings to voice your concerns
Educate the Offender		
• Point out the commonality • Appeal to the offenders values and principles • Differentiate between intent and impact • Promote empath • Point to how they benefit	• Describe the benefits of workforce diversity • Institute long-term mandated training on cultural sensitivity for all levels • Infuse multicultural principles into organizational mission and values	• Raise children to understand concepts like prejudice, discrimination, and racism. • Challenge silence/lack of response to macroaggression • Identify shared mutual goals among people • Increase community's exposure to positive examples of diverse cultures to offset negative stereotypes and biases
Seek External Intervention		
• Alert Authorities • Report the act • Seek therapy/counseling • Seek support through spirituality/religion/community • Set up a buddy system • Attend support groups	• Report inequitable practices to your union • Create networking/mentoring opportunities for underrepresented employees/students • Maintain an open, supportive, and responsive environment • Call on consultants to conduct external assessments/cultural audits	• Foster cooperation over competition • Foster a sense of community belonging • Create caucuses for allies and targets • Participate in healing circles, vigils, memorials that remind us of the consequences of hate

Note. Reprinted from "Disarming Racial Microaggression: Microintervention strategies for targets, White allies, and bystanders, Sue et al., 2019, American Psychologist, 74, 128-142. This table is being used with written consent.

progress monitoring. It is my hope for this paper that the highlighted framework provides ideas to CSD programs to reduce microaggressions in academia and serve as a guide to improve the overall climate of a program thus supporting minority students' well-being and promote their academic success.

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2020). Profile of ASHA members and affiliates with PhDs, year-end 2019. Retrieved October 25, 2020, from https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/2019-Year-End-Counts-PhD-Tables.pdf

Battle, D. (1999). Retention of minority faculty in higher education. *Issues in Higher Education, 3*(2), 7-12. https://doi.org/10.1044/ihe3.2.7

Berk, R. A. (2017). Microaggressions trilogy: Part 3. Microaggressions in the classroom. *Journal of Faculty Development, 31*(2), 69–83.

Campbell, B. & Manning, J. (2014). Microaggressions and moral cultures. *Comparative Sociology, 13, 692-726*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15691330-12341332

Caplan, P. J., & Ford, J. C. (2014). The voices of diversity: What students of diverse races/ethnicities and both sexes tell us about their college experiences and their perceptions about their institutions' progress toward diversity. *APORIA*, 6(3), 30–69.

Ginsberg, S. M. (2018). Stories of success: African American speech-language pathologists' academic resilience. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences and Disorders, 2*(3), article 4, 1-16. DOI: doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD2.3Ginsberg

Harrison, C. & Tanner, K. D. (2018). Language matters: Considering microaggressions in science. C*BE Life Sciences Education, 17*(1), 1-8. doi:10.1187/cbe.18-01-0011

Lilienfeld, S. (2017). Microaggressions: Strong claims, inadequate evidence. *Psychological Science,12, 138-169.*

Minikel-Lacocque, J. (2013). Racism, college, and the power of words: Racial microaggressions reconsidered. *American Educational Research Journal, 50*(3): 432-465.

Myotte, T., Hutchins, T.L., Cannizzaro, M.S., & Belin, G. (2011). Understanding why speech language pathologists rarely pursue a PhD in communication sciences and disorders. *Communication Disorders Quarterly, 33*(1), 42-54. DOI: 10.1177/1525740109356799.

Nadal, K. L., Wong, Y., Griffin, K. E., Davidoff, K., & Sriken, J. (2014). The adverse impact of racial microaggressions on college students' self-esteem. *Journal of College Student Development, 55*(5), 461-474.

Pasque, P. A., Chesler, M. A., Charbeneau, J., & Carlson, C. (2013). Pedagogical approaches to student racial conflict in the classroom. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 6, 1–16*

Pierce, C., Carew, J., Pierce-Gonzalez, D., & Willis, D. (1978). An experiment in racism: TV commercials. In C. Pierce (Ed.), Television and education (pp. 62-88). Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

Seidel, S. B., Reggi, A. L., Shinske, J. N., Burrus, L. W., & Tanner, K. D. (2015). Beyond the biology: A systematic investigation of noncontent instructor talk in an introductory biology course. *CBE-Life Sciences Education, 14*(4), ar43.

Sue, D.W. (in press). Microaggressions and student activism: Harmless impact and victimhood controversies. In G. C. Torino, D. P. Rivera, C. M. Capodilupo, K. L. Nadal & D. W. Sue (Eds.), *Microaggression theory: Influence and implications*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender and sexual orientation*. New York, NY: John Wiley.

Sue, D.W., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M. N., Glaeser, E., Calle, C. Z, & Mendez, N. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, white allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist,74*(1), 128-142.

Thomas, K. R. (2008). Macrononsense in multiculturalism. *American Psychologist, 63, 274 275.*

Torres, L., Driscoll, M. W., & Burrow, A. L. (2010). Racial microaggressions and psychological functioning among highly achieving African Americans: A mixed-methods approach. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 29, 1074-1099.*

Contact Information:
Karen C. Davis, Ph.D. CCC-SLP
Email: Karen.Davis@mtsu.edu